

EXODUS 4:18-31

THE DELIVERER IS SENT, BUT SLIGHTLY DETAINED

Last week Moses threw every excuse he had at God and God took them away one by one. I would venture to say that we have all been there. As we read through the Bible we see that many of those whom God used were guilty of the same. It is in our fallen nature to rebel against God whether in a subtle manner or in a full fledged frontal assault. Moses was like many Christians in the sense that he was caught in between those two extremes.

We want to follow God and in many ways we do, but in other ways we are hesitant. Most of the time that hesitancy comes from being put in a position where we feel uncomfortable. We are most uncomfortable when we are not in control of our circumstances, but that in essence is the Christian life. We walk by faith according to God's will. That means we have surrendered control of our lives. What we have to do is grow into being comfortable with God being in control of our every circumstance. At that point anything He wants to accomplish through us is possible and we never have to worry about being uncomfortable again.

Having been brought to repentance, Moses visits his father-in-law before he leaves.

Moses Goes to Egypt

18 So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

Once you have lived in the same place for forty years it can be hard to leave. Moses asked his father-in-law if it was all right to leave and was told to go in peace. This had to be an encouragement for Moses. Even though he had just come from his “burning bush” experience, I am sure he still had some misgivings about leaving his home and the family he had known for the last forty years. We aren’t told that Moses told his father-in-law about the burning bush. Moses didn’t tell him why he had to go. All he asked was for permission to return to his people. I’m sure that not having anyone try to keep him from leaving was seen as a good sign to Moses. Sometimes you just have to let people go.

19 Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.” 20 Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

21 And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” ’”

The last half of chapter four is much easier to comprehend if you realize that it is happening while Moses and his family, are on the move. Though we read in verse 19 that they returned to Egypt, it is evident in the next few verses that they are still in Midian.

Moses took all that he needed. He had the rod of God in his hand. The one tool he was told to take; he took. While they make their way West, God goes back over the plan and what Moses should expect when he gets to Egypt. He tells him to perform all the

wonders of which He had shown him but then He tells him that they won't work as far as Pharaoh is concerned. God stated that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. I don't want to camp out on this too long here. I will deal with it in more depth later. Here God states that He will harden Pharaoh's heart. Elsewhere the bible says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Is there a contradiction or some error in the Bible? Certainly not! The truth is that they are both true.

It is like the difference between Play Doh and modeling clay. Play Doh feels like modeling clay but it will harden if it is left out of its container for too long. Modeling clay can be left out for a good while and won't harden. They can be exposed to the same elements but you will get different results. Modeling clay has oil in it. The oil keeps it from hardening. The Holy Spirit is symbolized as oil. It is He – the Holy Spirit who keeps us from hardening our hearts. God hardened Pharaoh's heart in the sense that He knew Pharaoh wouldn't let the Hebrews leave. God had perfect foreknowledge of that. Pharaoh wouldn't bow to the God of the Hebrews. He hardened his own heart. The two things work together.

In verse 22 we see that God begins to focus on the firstborn son. He compares the firstborn son of Pharaoh to Israel, whom He likens to a firstborn son. In that culture it was the firstborn son that inherited everything. The firstborn son was one of privilege. God told Moses to relay to Pharaoh that if he didn't let His firstborn son go then He would kill Pharaoh's firstborn son.

Then when we get to verse 24 it seems like the scribe or copyist changes channels on us.

24 And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. 25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at

Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" 26 So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.

As they were traveling, Moses is getting clarification of instructions from God. God is talking about sons when all of a sudden verse 24 states that as they were about to make camp for the night, God met him and sought to kill him. Now we have to ask ourselves who was God going to kill and why? Why would God show up at the campsite, seemingly out of the blue to kill someone?

I believe a little history will shed some light on the subject. You may recall that God made a covenant with Abraham. That was back in Genesis 15: 10-14. God promised to make a great nation out of Abraham's seed. They would be slaves in a foreign land but would be brought back to the land of Canaan after a time. Moses is going to Egypt as God's man in order to help bring that covenant to fruition.

In Genesis 17:10-14 we read of another part of that covenant. As a sign of that covenant all the male children were to be circumcised on the 8th day. There is a medical reason for that to occur on the 8th day. At any rate, verse 14 says that any male child that is not circumcised will be "cut off." That is a phrase meaning put to death. Therefore what we see is a situation in which Moses' son had yet to be circumcised. And what goes without being said is that Moses wasn't circumcised, at least in the proper way. The Egyptians practiced circumcisions, as did other nations at the time, but they didn't remove the entire foreskin. The total circumcision was a way of confirming, upon consummation of a marriage that the man was an Israelite. Moses was about to head into Egypt to represent God regarding a covenant in which he, himself had yet to fully embrace. And if he had been fully circumcised at this point of

the journey, then he would not have been able to travel for some time until he healed. Waiting on Moses would have caused issues for the entire mission. So Zipporah performed the circumcision on at least one of the sons, which was a priestly act by the way and then touches Moses' "feet" with it. Why touch his "feet"?

- Feet – a Hebrew euphemism for genitalia. Ruth and Boaz, et al.

God had to honor His word. Moses had procrastinated. So we can't read this in such a manner that we see Zipporah as angry because of having to circumcise her child, even though the punctuation in some translations might lead us to that conclusion.

The man of God cannot expect any exemptions. He has to be an example. If Moses didn't heed the covenant then how could he expect the Hebrews to heed it or the Law that he would eventually give to the people?

Moses could not continue in his role until he had all of his own ducks in a row.

"There can be no doubt that for some reason unrecorded Moses had failed to carry out the divine instructions concerning circumcision... Obedience completely established, everything moved forward." (Morgan)

There is often a point of confrontation in the life of the leader or any Christian for that matter, where God demands that they lay aside some area of compromise, and will not allow them to progress further until they do.

27 And the Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him. 28 So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. 30 And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

It is once again apparent in verse 27 that they are still in Midian or at least in the region. Aaron was told by God to go and meet Moses. They met on the Mountain of God; what we now refer to as Mount Sinai. It is also referred to as Mount Horeb.

This allowed them time to get reacquainted and to go over the plan and miracles God had given Moses. I can see them talking about this all the way from Midian (Saudi Arabia) back to Egypt. I'm sure that having his brother next to him on this most epic task was a comfort to Moses. God does those things for us even when they can be a hindrance in the long run. God humors us. He knows our weaknesses and quirks.

One of the excuses Moses gave was that the people wouldn't listen to him when he got back to Egypt. This excuse was dispelled almost immediately. Moses performed the miracles and Aaron spoke the words of God and the people believed. They then bowed their heads and worshipped God.

This is the natural progression. **We hear the Word, perhaps see miracles and we believe. Belief is followed by worship. After**

all, you can't really worship that in which you don't believe.

As believers we are to worship. The Hebrews bowed their heads and thanked God for their coming deliverance. We have been delivered from the penalty of sin and death and are now to be priests in the kingdom of God here on earth. Therefore we should thank God and worship Him for our deliverance, being a priestly example to others.

Just as it was with the Hebrew people, we have been delivered. Just as they had a long journey ahead of them, we do also. Just as Moses had to get his ducks on a row so as to be able to begin his mission and be effective, so do we.

Whatever it is that is holding us back is a bondage from which we can be delivered if we will submit our wills to God and allow Him to work on us, in us and through us.

But maybe the most amazing continuing theme in this story is that of the grace of God! Even after Moses had been called and had begun his journey, having received his marching orders, he is still hindered by sin. Did God confront him? Yes, He did, but God was aware of Moses' failure prior to his starting his trip. And God still confided in Moses and was still willing to use him. That is grace my friend! I firmly believe that God had been dealing with Moses regarding the issue of circumcision for some time and Moses had been procrastinating. Let's face it - Moses was a bit of a whiner! And so are we! But God was still active in His life! God was still constantly working to move Moses to the place in which He could be fulfilled! God still does the same thing with us today! It has taken us a few weeks of Bible study to see Moses get to this point. That is encouraging to me because we are just like Moses when it comes to removing some strongholds in our lives. We procrastinate because it will be painful or will move us out of our comfort zones.

And God is patient with us. He is gracious and long-suffering!

If we are honest, we can get discouraged at ourselves because we are privy to the things in our lives that are holding us back. We know where we are willingly disobedient to God and the enemy uses that to pour guilt into our lives. **Guilt comes from the enemy. Conviction comes from the Holy Spirit.**

When the enemy has painted you into a corner and convinced you of your unworthiness, agree with him! We are all unworthy, but that is where the grace of God takes over!

When you have been convinced of all your faults and failures, know that the love of God is so much higher than the pile of failures you have been shown. **God is gracious and He is faithful!**

I want to leave y'all this week with the same prayer Paul prayed for the Church at Phillipi.

Phillipians 1: 3-6

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;